

Northeast Asian Security: Mongolia and Korea

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Abstract

Mongolia comes from a similar political landscape to North Korea, but is adapting well from its old system to its new market economy. Mongolia's transformation over the last 20 years can demonstrate to North Korea that political change can be achieved successfully and peacefully, and in this way, from a position of experience Mongolia can better explain to North Korea the benefits of democratic reform.

Keywords: Mongolia-Korea relations, North Korea, Republic of Korea.

Background

Archaeologists have said that the roots of Mongolian and Korean culture are clearly the same (The Korean Association for Mongolian Studies 2009). Philological study has also confirmed linguistic closeness between the Korean and Mongolian languages (Ki Sun Kim 2009).¹ This historical record of a close connection between the two cultures dates back more than 1500 years. Recently, after normalization of relations between Mongolia and Korea, ties are becoming even closer than in ancient times. From Korea's perspective, Mongolia is a very important country, primarily because Korea's relations with Mongolia will impact relations between the North and the Republic of Korea (RoK).

The RoK has frequently promoted to North Korea the concept of a market-based economy, various political and economic reforms, and democracy. But to date there has been little progress in getting North Korea to change. On this point, Mongolia is especially important for the RoK, because Mongolia can explain concepts of economic and political reform to North Korea from experience. North Koreans have said that they fear market-based economic reforms, because they believe that the elite will lose power and be killed by their own people if such reforms are implemented (The North Korea Freedom Coalition 2003-2006). But Mongolia is the perfect example to illustrate to North Korea's powerful elite that no one was actually hurt during the transition period of new government and reform. Mongolia has effectively demonstrated to the world how they changed their political parties and government without violence. North Korea can learn from Mongolia's experience of the market economic system over the last 20 years.

This friendly relationship between Mongolia and North Korea goes back many years. As noted by the Ministry of Health, especially during the Korean War, many North Korean orphans sought refuge in Mongolia. Most went back to the North in the 1960s but still many North Koreans recall how much Mongolia helped them during the war. Until

¹ The Mongolian word for "left" and "right" is *Jum garon teashi* and *Baron garon teashi*, and the Korean for "left" and "right" is *Wenpyun* and *Brun pyun*. Also many words on JeJu Island still use Mongolian derivatives, especially words related to "horse."

this year, the two countries had regular exchanges between students, government, and party officials.

In 2008, more than 30,000 Mongolians were working in the RoK, and a couple of thousand Koreans lived in Mongolia. These numbers provide good resources for both countries' economies. In total, according to police reports more than 40,000 Mongolians live in Korea. Of course no one really knows about the number of people who live illegally in Korea. Marriage, missionary work and study are major reasons to stay in Korea.

International Cooperation

Anti-terrorism

Northeast Asian countries need to work together, especially in the War on Terrorism. Trade of missiles and weapons is a serious issue we must face in Northeast Asia. Controls are needed, particularly on exports and imports to criminal elements. Refined information exchanges are also required because today's international terrorists operate country to country, which makes international cooperation vital. Northeast Asian nations need to exchange not only intelligence on identifying terrorist organizations, but also information about the transit of suspected members, contact information, and banking and financial data of suspected terrorists. The War on Terror is not the responsibility of any one country, but an obligation of all nations. As such, the RoK and Mongolia have clearly shown willingness to be major supporters of the fight against terrorism.

Proliferation Security Initiative and weapons of mass destruction

To reduce tensions in Northeast Asia, support is required from regional nations. Because of its geographical location, Mongolia is an important country for gaining such support. Of course, other regional powers – Russia, China and Japan – are also important countries, but particularly if Mongolia, Japan and Korea can cooperate more closely, many good outcomes can be achieved. A couple of years ago I thought that even with the reasonably good results from the Six Party talks we cannot clearly predict what will happen, but at least the talks were a good first step. If six countries agreed that North Korea should no longer have nuclear weapons, North East Asia will have a more secure future. Of course initially we thought progress was made in 2006 and 2007, but then in 2007 North Korea tested a ballistic missile. The subsequent missile test of April 2009 changed the situation dramatically. However, it is very important that we persist in preventing North Korea from developing nuclear weapons by encouraging them to change their policy.

Despite obstacles that prevent the implementation of this agreement, the agreement will give us more strength so we can proceed to the next stage, such as supporting the Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation Security Initiative. The RoK and Mongolia should prepare to join or otherwise support future PSI operations.

Making Northeast Asia a non-nuclear weapons zone

Nuclear weapons are a danger in any country, but even more so when inadequate controls are in place. The Republic of Korea, Japan and Mongolia can clearly demonstrate that they do not need nuclear weapons, thereby enhancing control of nuclear powers. We know that nuclear weapons cannot ultimately protect a regime nor help in any way the economic situation of a nation. But some countries still adhere to the belief that nuclear weapons can only help their security and economic stability. By sending the strong message that

nuclear weapons are unnecessary, and by constantly explaining and reminding neighboring countries on this point, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Mongolia can make a positive impact on increasing stability in Northeast Asia.

A new security organization for Northeast Asia

A new international organization to guarantee peace, stability and security for Northeast Asian countries could play a pivotal role in bringing North Korea onto the international stage. Such an organization could be similar to NATO, and should include the USA, Japan, Mongolia, Russia, China, the Republic of Korea and North Korea itself. North Korea's membership in such an organization would be essential, and its participation would also provide greater opportunities for the North to actively engage with other countries, as well as learning and understanding more about how the rest of the world really works. Since we cannot yet penetrate North Korea's closed system, we must entice North Korea to come out and join the world community. This new Northeast Asian organization may also be charged with the responsibility of controlling inspections in Northeast Asia and preventing the trafficking in nuclear materials and other weapons of mass destruction. Such a new organization is essential for the security and stability of the region.

Anti-drug and other operations

Drug operations continue to grow as more countries become involved in illicit drug trading. The Northeast Asian community can cooperate on an international scale, especially targeting origins of drug production and the control of drug trafficking and sales. Together Northeast Asian countries must attempt to prevent the export of illegal drugs from the outset. Other operations, such as counterfeiting money, must be stopped and prevented. Counterfeiting damages worldwide economies and hurts international markets. For example, if one country gets information about counterfeiting from another country, the information should be shared immediately with other countries and relevant international law enforcement agencies, along with the full identities of those involved and methods revealed. Through aggressive cooperation we can have a greater impact on the prevention of counterfeiting in Northeast Asia.

Counterfeit cigarette operations

A Northeast Asian organization can also work together toward eliminating cigarette counterfeiting. As counterfeit cigarette operations need the backing of criminal organizations on an international scale, international cooperation is the only effective countermeasure.

Because of North Korea's nuclear weapons problem

Nuclear weapons testing and lack of nuclear controls during Kim Jong-il's regime means that we must vigilantly watch the North. We will need further inspections and Six-party talks, and the Northeast Asian community will be responsible for the inspections and guarantees for North Korea. International cooperation is also essential for exchanging port and airport information, so we understand what North Korean ships and airplanes carry and their destinations. We can explain to North Korea what benefits will be available to them if they join the international community and relinquish all nuclear weapons and programs.

Between Mongolia and the Republic of Korea

New perspective needed for Korean Peninsula specialists

Twenty years ago, most Korea specialists from Mongolia studied in North Korea, mainly because they had no opportunity to study or do research in the Republic of Korea, although now this situation has changed.

At present, most Mongolians study in the RoK, but both countries have to consider the best methods to help these students become good specialists in Korean studies. First, we must capitalize on the fact that Mongolian students who study in the RoK will have a much better understanding of a market-based economic system than students studying in North Korea. Those who study in the RoK should be better prepared and willing to use this knowledge not only back in Mongolia, but also in helping North Korea understand that reforms won't be so threatening. Around twenty years ago many Mongolians studied in North Korea, not only in Pyongyang but also in Chungjin and other different cities. Even though knowledge gained in North Korea has been very useful over the last twenty years, the international environment has since changed. Due to North Korea's isolation policy and weakened economic state, Mongolian students think that North Korea no longer offers opportunities to study economics, technology, banking and the computer industry. On the other hand, many Mongolian students like to study in the RoK. If Mongolia's specialists in Korean first study in the RoK instead, and then go to North Korea, they can more effectively entice the North to change, and in doing so contribute to the stability of Northeast Asia.

RoK must do more to facilitate Mongolians' chance to work in the RoK

I lived in Mongolia more than 10 years ago, and at that time I noted that Mongolians were trying to learn very fast and eagerly; they worked and studied very diligently. Today there are many Mongolians working in the RoK, and mostly they too are very committed to working and learning hard. When I look at the Mongolian worker in Korea, I am reminded of Koreans' past work record in foreign countries, and Mongolians are doing the same today. Forty years ago, many Koreans traveled abroad, leaving family and friends behind to earn money, which became Korea's major source of income at that time. Simultaneously, this overseas work experience helped the RoK's economic development in the 1960s and 1970s by developing the country's capital and technology base. In the same way, someone from Mongolia now working in Korea might be in a position to strengthen Mongolia's economy after they return to Mongolia, and so it is very important to encourage more Mongolians to work in Korea.

Discreet support needed from Mongolia to assist North Korean refugees

To date, more than 13,000 North Korean refugees have been settled in the RoK, with more refugees arriving every year. However, North Korean refugees are experiencing increasing trouble in China (US North Korea Human Rights Committee Report 2007 and 2008). The NE Asian Community could save many lives if Mongolia would permit a temporary refugee camp in their country. The North Korean refugee issue is not only a political issue, but a human rights one as well. Most North Korean refugees escape the North not only for political reasons, but mostly economic ones. After they arrive in China, North Korean refugees are granted little support or protection from the Chinese government, and are usually deported back to North Korea. Back in their home country,

many refugees cannot get a job and in a food-rationing country like North Korea, no job means survival is unlikely. North Koreans who succeed in escaping often have little choice but to deal with dangerous people, criminal elements and those eager to sell North Korean women into prostitution. A few women are fortunate enough to find a husband in China, but this is unlikely for most women.²

When they escape from North Korea, refugees have two directions to travel: north or south. The northern route leads to Russia and Mongolia, while the southern route leads to Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. However, the southern route is too far from North Korea, and the northern route is difficult to cross covertly, as the border between Mongolia and China is mainly exposed desert, so refugees are easily discovered by Chinese border patrols. If there was a refugee camp in Mongolia, refugees could be discreetly moved to the RoK and many North Koreans could be saved. This would not only be a human rights success, but it would also enhance Mongolia's reputation as a humanitarian country in Northeast Asia and the world.

The issue of North Korean refugees will not go away anytime soon because it is caused by North Korea's dismal economic situation and its dictatorial political tyranny. Stability for Northeast Asia can only be achieved when we solve North Korea's economic problems, which is related to stopping the North's nuclear weapons programs. But before solving the nuclear problem and the Chinese government's treatment of North Korean refugees, the NE Asia community must aggressively support the settlement of North Korean refugees.

North Korea's Human Rights Issues

Stability in the region is influenced by human rights abuses. What North Korea is now doing to its people is like plucking birds from the sky, caging them, and then telling the rest of the international community that they need money to feed the captured birds because there's no money in the NK birdcage. Birds do not need birdcages, they need their freedom, and so North Korean people need liberation from a government that stifles their existence. Kim Jong-il's birdcage is ultimately creating instability in Northeast Asia.

If North Korea cannot feed its own people, then the easiest solution for the North is just to let them go free. North Koreans know how to live and how to survive, but the only problem is that they do not have the freedom to do so. Even during the Korean War more than a half-century ago, few people died of starvation and one of the main reasons for this was that people had the freedom to keep searching for food and look for new jobs. But now they cannot freely move from one place to another. We know that inside a birdcage, a bird without food will soon die. But outside of a birdcage, birds cannot die from starvation. Improving North Korea's human rights will help improve North Korea's living conditions and reduce tension on the Korean Peninsula.

² According to data from the Unification Ministry, more women came from North Korea than any other country. The data also reports that more than 50 percent of people fled from North Korea due to difficult living conditions (Unification Ministry RoK 2004). From 2000 to 2004 June, 4,716 people came from the RoK; 2,007 of this number were men, 2,945 people were women.

North Korean Studies

Mongolia and the Republic of Korea can embark jointly on various North Korean studies. Topics for study and research should focus on questions like: how can we fundamentally help North Korea's economic reforms, and how can we genuinely improve the North Korean human rights situation? We could also study other questions, such as: How can we help small businesses prosper in North Korea? What can be done to help North Korea improve its dilapidated transportation system? How can we assist North Korea to improve local markets, or so-called *Jang ma dang* and farmers' markets? We could also study together about how to reduce the number of government workers in North Korea. In this case we could research a number of different areas and decide whether to start by looking at the party, the military or the government bureaucracy. In the case of the military, we could examine what areas could best be reduced: infantry, artillery or armored troops, or the political army. Regarding the North Korean Labor Party, we should decide whether to first begin with the local party, the central party or the administrative apparatus, or the overall organizational structure. There are many areas to be considered.

We can also apply to our joint studies Mongolia's wealth of experience in developing a viable market-based economy without substantial capital outlays. Now North Korea still has no capital ownership and no significant private business. Most people in North Korea have no experience of a market-based economic system. They may have some familiarity with small business practices in farmers' markets and so-called *Jang ma dang*, but such experience is highly limited to local situations. Some people in larger cities have sales experience, but mostly belong to a government organization, such as a county economic committee, district economic committee, or local city party economic committee. Real private market sales experience will be necessary before North Koreans can adjust to the realities and benefits available in a market system. This is another point where Mongolia has the upper hand in being able to help North Korea learn how to move from a socialist economy to a free-market system.

Conclusion

North Korea cannot remain oblivious to the plight of its people, who will continue to flee because of economic factors. Their people are hungry and are beginning to slowly learn about the bounty in other parts of the world, especially in the RoK. For more than a decade Mongolia has worked aggressively to peacefully replace its failed socialist economy with a market system that works. Mongolia has had a close relationship with the North at least since the Korean War, but now also has strong ties with the South. Mongolia is uniquely positioned to make significant contributions in helping North Korean refugees and to assist in educating North Koreans about the benefits of changing their economic and political systems gradually but progressively towards a market system, and giving more freedom to its people. The RoK and Mongolia should closely work together to identify opportunities that entice North Korea to follow Mongolia's successful transition. Mongolia has a major role to play in facilitating stability in Northeast Asia through its cooperative efforts with the RoK, and in helping the people of North Korea.

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